

SnowFlower Sangha Conflict Resolution Guidelines

The ultimate basis for working with conflict in our community is the Fourth (of the Five) Mindfulness Training:

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I am committed to cultivating loving speech and compassionate listening in order to relieve suffering and to promote reconciliation and peace in myself and among other people, ethnic and religious groups, and nations. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I am committed to speaking truthfully using words that inspire confidence, joy, and hope. When anger is manifesting in me, I am determined not to speak. I will practice mindful breathing and walking in order to recognize and to look deeply into my anger. I know that the roots of anger can be found in my wrong perceptions and lack of understanding of the suffering in myself and in the other person. I will speak and listen in a way that can help myself and the other person to transform suffering and see the way out of difficult situations. I am determined not to spread news that I do not know to be certain and not to utter words that can cause division or discord. I will practice Right Diligence to nourish my capacity for understanding, love, joy, and inclusiveness, and gradually transform anger, violence, and fear that lie deep in my consciousness.

Working with our own upset and anger

- What happens to our upset and anger when we use mindful breathing to stop the racing thoughts and create a bigger space around our anger?
- What happens to our anger when we send phrases of lovingkindness to ourselves, or put our hand on our heart and tell ourselves, “I care about this suffering”?
- What happens to our anger when we send phrases of lovingkindness to the other person?
- What happens to our anger when we look deeply into our feelings and reactions, using the question “What else is there?” to uncover the feelings behind the feelings?
- What happens to our anger when we turn our attention to activities that we know will nourish our happiness and well-being?
- How does our anger shift and change the day after the incident that upset us? A week after the incident that upset us?

Getting together with the other person

- Consider writing a Peace Note to the other person, letting them know about the issue and asking for their consent to meet. How might your feelings and perspectives about the conflict change?
- Avoid getting together with the other person if we still feel significantly upset or triggered. It is best to let some time pass, using the opportunity for practice, before meeting.
- If the hurt is deep, it may be useful to get together with a spiritual friend before meeting with the other person.

At the meeting:

- What happens to the energy between us when we sit in silent practice together?
- What happens to the energy between us when we acknowledge our own imperfections and part in the conflict?

- What happens to the energy between us if we truly hear the other person's story, perhaps rephrasing what they say so they know we have heard the essence of what they said? If they can truly hear our story?
- What happens to the energy between us when we express our own hurt without blaming or criticizing the other person, genuinely asking the other person to help us understand why they have spoken/acted the way they have?
- What happens to our own feelings and the energy between us when we focus our attention on the grain of truth in the other person's story? Or if we cannot do that, on our appreciation of the other person's willingness to share deeply with us, and the opportunity that creates to deepen our relationship with them?
- If intense emotions or thoughts arise, what happens if we invite the bell and come back to the breath for a few minutes?
- What happens to the energy between us if we each listen deeply at the end of the meeting to each other's answer to the question, "What is still left unresolved for you?"

Seeking support from spiritual friends and senior practitioners

- Would it be helpful to seek support and clarity from a trusted spiritual friend? (See list of senior practitioners in the additional resources.)
- Would it be more helpful to get support from one person or have a group of people hear me out and ask questions to deepen my understanding?
- A spiritual friend helps most by:
 - listening deeply
 - not rescuing
 - not judging
 - not offering advice
 - not taking sides
 - helping me take 100% responsibility for my experience and let go of blame
 - supporting the way forward rather than letting me get lost in my story
 - trusting my inner wisdom
 - being present with an attitude of openness, "Beginner's Mind"

My joy is like spring, so warm it makes flowers bloom in all walks of life.

My pain is like a river of tears, so full it fills the four oceans.

Please call me by my true names,

so I can hear all my cries and laughs at once,

so I can see that my joy and pain are one.

Please call me by my true names,

so I can wake up,

and so the door of my heart can be left open,

the door of compassion.